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TAGS: [KNNP](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: VATICAN - IRAN: POSSIBLE ENGAGEMENT ON NUCLEAR ISSUE

REF: State 19516

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REASON: 1.4 (d)
(NOTE: Re-transmitting as earlier transmission appears not to have succeeded.)

Summary

¶1. (C) The Holy See's diplomatic relationship with Iran is an East-West and Christian-Muslim link that could present an opportunity for dialogue and leverage. The Holy See talks regularly to the resident Iranian ambassador and his relatively large staff, encouraging Iran not to turn away from the international community. The pope's public statements with Iranian implications have also served USG interests. Though the Vatican-Iran relationship is not without complications, the link offers a chance for some influence on the regime. Post could pursue any specific approach to the Holy See on Iran the Department might suggest. End Summary.

Overlooked Link

¶2. (C) The Holy See's fifty-year plus diplomatic relationship with Iran is an often-overlooked East-West and Christian-Muslim link that could present an opportunity for dialogue and leverage. Throughout the turbulent events of recent decades, the Vatican has maintained relations with Iran, and keeps up dialogue with its resident ambassador, Mohammad Javad Faridzadeh. He is a "thoughtful, scholarly" man, Holy See Deputy Foreign Minister Pietro Parolin told the Ambassador recently, though he noted that Faridzadeh's lack of knowledge of Western languages hindered his integration with the Vatican Diplomatic Corps and others in Vatican City. Iran has a relatively large mission to the Vatican, with seven diplomatic personnel assigned to the Holy See (one more than U.S. Embassy Vatican).

¶3. (C) Parolin said that the Vatican had been encouraging Iran to be open to the international community during recent stand-offs. For his part, the pope clearly had Iran on his mind during his World Peace Day message when publicly cautioning states "planning to acquire" nuclear weapons. He has also been definitive in declaring the right of Israel to exist in peace with its neighbors. According to Parolin, Iran takes notice of such public statements. Recent presidential diatribes notwithstanding, "they don't like bad press," he observed.

Challenges to Relations

¶4. (C) Recent relations have not been without challenges. Speaking to the Ambassador, Parolin recalled that when Iran and the Holy See celebrated the 50th anniversary of their

relationship in 2004 Iran planned a big reception in honor of the event, to be held in cooperation with the Holy See. "They said they wanted to invite the diplomats from every country except two," Parolin said, "and I think you can guess which two." According to Parolin, the Vatican said that it would not take part in the reception unless the entire diplomatic corps was invited - including Israel and the U.S.

15. (C) More recently, during a diplomatic corps planning session in October for the corps' annual address to the pope, the difficulties of relations again became apparent. Israeli ambassador Oded Ben-Hur angrily demanded an inclusion in the corps' speech of the fact that one of the countries represented (Iran) had just called for Israel to be wiped off the earth. Ambassador Faridzadeh was in attendance, but seemed not to understand that he was being called to task. The other assembled diplomats, however, seemed to grasp the dilemma - and the opportunity that the Holy See's link with Iran presented.

Opportunity

16. (C) Middle East issues are at the top of the Holy See's foreign policy agenda, and our interlocutors are already well aware of U.S. views on the region. Recently we discussed ref (a) points on Iran and the UNSC, which the Vatican is currently studying. However, we could pursue any specific approach to the Holy See on Iran the Department might suggest. Targeted sharing of intelligence or strategy on Iran could lead to further help from the Holy See on these issues.

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